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ABSTRACT

Textbooks are powerful technologies that are foundational to introductory level courses. In the research site of an introductory economic classroom, the textbook is positioned as having status similar to that of a canonical religious text. This study investigated how student reading and writing can be problematic when introductory level courses rely heavily on a textbook. The study was part of a larger study of the literacy and learning of first-year economics students. Thirteen students were interviewed on two occasions to capture and interpret the meanings they associated with the experiences of the literacy, social practices, and cultural practices of introductory economics. Findings show that by positioning the textbook as an authoritative text on which students are expected to rely, the teaching staff unwittingly generated concerns and fears among students when writing in the course. The concerns and fears about plagiarism that framed their writing were either confirmed or alleviated when their first assignment was marked and returned. Evidence from this study suggests that introductory textbooks may make learning to read and write economics more difficult than insiders in the discipline would imagine. (Contains 2 figures and 49 references.) (SLD)

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Introductory textbooks and plagiarism in higher education: a case study from Economics

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Abstract

Textbooks are powerful technologies that are foundational to introductory level courses across a variety of disciplines in higher education. In the disciplinary context of Economics and in the particular research site of an introductory Economics classroom, the textbook is positioned as having status similar to that of a canonical religious text.

Western educational practices require students to write in their own words after reading received, authoritative accounts of ideas and concepts that are held to be fundamental to a discipline. The paper explores the complexities and dilemmas for students of reading and writing from textbooks and uncovers ambiguities, unresolved tensions and anxieties concerning plagiarism.

Introduction

Across a range of disciplines and fields including the sciences, business, economics, psychology and even sociology, large, glossy textbooks are available to highly competitive, discriminating markets in higher education. Apple (1991) and Luke (1988) have explored how the artefact of the textbook and the textbook publishing industry, are central in the distribution of 'legitimated' knowledge to school classrooms. In the context of higher education a study guide, a bank of sample examination questions, overhead transparencies and/or power point slides, all of which are designed to persuade the increasingly 'time-poor' university teacher to adopt the textbook, invariably accompany modern introductory textbooks in a range of disciplines. However, the pedagogical consequences of this pervasive technology are not necessarily positive for student engagement and learning. The paper seeks to illustrate how student reading and writing can be problematic when introductory level courses rely heavily on a textbook.

This paper reports on a small part of a much larger study which examined the literacy and learning experiences of a group of first year undergraduates in their encounters with the discipline of economics (Richardson, 2000). Through an analysis of lectures, tutorials, textbooks and reading and writing assignments, the research exposes the complex and often unrecognised language and disciplinary demands and their significance in influencing the students' ultimate academic success.

The following questions guided the research: How do these students construct themselves as students of Economics? How do these students construct the cultural model for success in this instructional and disciplinary culture? How does reading from academic texts become part of the personal resources upon which students draw when completing a piece of writing in an academic discipline? What agency do these

students see themselves having in the instructional culture? How are the discourses and genres of the discipline instantiated in the discursive practices of the instructional culture?

Theoretical perspectives

The study is founded on a view that sees literacy as having no meaning "apart from the particular cultural contexts in which it is used" (Gee: 1994:170) - a view that extends well beyond the traditional notion of literacy as an ability to read and write. Indeed, the paper argues that academic literacy(ies) cannot be narrowly perceived and defined as a set of general skills of reading and writing which once acquired can be seamlessly transferred from one context to another. We should expect then that reading, writing, speaking and listening, would play significantly different roles in different social contexts, performing different social actions (Brandt, 1990) in a dynamic process of sustaining and progressing disciplinary tribes and academic cultures (Becher, 1989). Similarly, the primary and secondary discourses we have acquired and learned and the discourse communities to which we already belong, impinge significantly on the ways in which we engage with new discourses and discourse communities (Gee, 1996; Swales, 1990; Becher, 1989; Russell, 1991). Who we perceive ourselves to be and the cultural values and models we live by irrevocably constitute literacy embedded in highly contextualised cultural performances. From this perspective student reading and writing is not seen as technical and instrumental or as a transparent medium of representation, it is configured as 'a context-making rather than a context-breaking ability' (Brandt, 1990: 39), a process that is contested (Lea and Street, 2000).

Until relatively recently little attention has been paid at the undergraduate level to the way the discursive practices of a field are 'embedded in the texture of its disciplinary activity' (Russell, 1992: 24). In effect, we have taken these discursive practices and activities for granted. Research of student and professional writing has highlighted the importance of disciplinary context (Bazerman, 1988; Herrington, 1985, Langer, 1992; Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey, 1987; Walvood and McCarthy, 1990; Prior, 1998; Huckin and Berkenkotter, 1995; Dias, Freedman, Medway and Pare, 1999) and drawn attention toward 'disciplinary specificity in writing and knowing' (Stockton, 1995: 47). Detailed accounts of discursive and literacy processes that specific disciplines bring into play at the undergraduate level as a means of engaging, recruiting and inducting new members have often highlighted the pedagogical barrenness of much undergraduate teaching and learning and pointed to an inability of university teachers to explicitly articulate or openly explore the discursive and literacy expectations of their professed discipline. My concern then was to document the experiences of undergraduates and to understand how particular students perceive, engage with and participate in the social, cultural and literacy practices of introductory level economics.

Method, data sources and analysis

The larger study from which this paper is drawn provides an interpretive ethnography that critically illuminates the literacy practices of an Introductory Economics course (Richardson, 2000). The paper focuses on data gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews with students over a two-year period at one of

Australia's largest universities. Data were gathered from a range of sources that included field notes, lectures and observations from one tutorial group, individual student interviews, group student interviews, individual interviews with teaching staff, attendance at staff meetings, collection of drafts of student assignments, final student assignments, course documents, course textbook, commercial textbook study guide, textbook computer disks, and copies of examination papers.

All lectures and interviews were audio taped and transcribed before transfer into NUD*IST, a computer program designed to assist with the analysis of qualitative data. This program was used to develop an inductive analytical approach to examining the richly textured unstructured data.

Thirteen students volunteered for in-depth interviews together with four staff members. Students were interviewed on two occasions with each interview lasting approximately 40 minutes. The staff members were also interviewed at least twice with each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. Over the two years of the data collection considerable time was spent in informal discussions with academics teaching the course. I have relied on the words, images, and metaphors of the participants in an effort to capture and interpret the meaning they themselves associated with and used to characterise the experiences of the literacy, social and cultural practices of introductory Economics.

Introductory Economics textbooks

Researchers from various fields and disciplines have increasingly turned their attention to the role that textbooks play in the induction of students into the content, beliefs, values and methodology of their respective disciplines (see Morawski (1992) in Psychology, Love (1991) in Geology, Myers (1992) in Biology, Klamer (1990) in Economics, and Lynch and Bogen (1997) in Sociology). However, while textbooks are central to a discipline, they are rarely, if ever, at its 'cutting edge' (Platt 1996: 33). Textbooks carry forward confirmed bodies of knowledge (Kuhn, 1970) often reifying and codifying statements as facts; yet, this 'second hand' information on which they rely also causes academics from all disciplines to 'jest about the deceptions and inaccuracies, made for the sake of clarity, simplicity, or profit' Morawski (1992: 162). Of concern however, is that once these 'facts' are established in the standardised textbooks their status as fact is confirmed and can remain uncontested for a considerable amount of time (Harré, 1990). Even though textbooks advance the production of a disciplinary core curriculum, they also tend to facilitate pedagogical assumptions that construct students as consumers to be filled with disciplinary knowledge, methods and practices. The pedagogical consequences Swales (1993: 224) states as a paradox:

> The better textbooks are at transmitting a canon of knowledge (one good), the worse they are at fostering critical reading (another good).

An extraordinary feature of Economics as a discipline in the academy has been the number of textbooks that have been written for the introductory level marketplace in higher education. As such these textbooks are central instruments in inculcating students into the methodological principles and tenets on which the discipline of

Economics is founded. They manage the discipline's image as a 'science' promoting the notion that economic knowledge is created through the application of scientific methods - Economics begins with assumptions and proceeds to build an economic model that is tested, within these parameters, for its predictive value. Regardless of their authors, introductory Economics textbooks are designed around the ideology, principles and premises of the neoclassical paradigm - a model which proposes that the economic world is made up of self-interested, rational, autonomous agents who exercise choice, engage in contractual exchange in order to maximise a utility or profit function under conditions of scarcity. Thus Economics is characterised as the science of choice - the study of how individuals/societies allocate their scarce resources to satisfy alternative and competing 'human wants'.

Textbook authors make up dummy-run exercises and examples to fit a construction of Economic life derived from models which are nominated as having universal validity, objectivity, realism and social acceptability (Kilberg, 1988: 53). Thus the economic models and graphical representations contained in introductory textbooks often ignore the 'facts of everyday life' (Bell, 1988: 138) and cannot easily address contemporary social issues or account for the complexity of economic activity in the real world (Lewis, 1995). Questions concerning the role of government, social welfare, unemployment, distribution of resources and income, and the like, are extraneous to the economic models students at the introductory level consider and need to learn to manipulate. Hence students are often 'alienated from the study of economic theory because they feel that the assumptions of economics are unrealistic (and, as a result, that the theory cannot be used for the formation of economic and social policy in which many of them are interested)' (Pappas and Henderson, 1977: iii-iv).

Traditional textbooks are the cornerstones of introductory level Economics curriculum and pedagogy in higher education, providing what Helburn (1986: 28) calls 'a consensual lens and an officially defined interpretation of reality'. According to Heyne (1995), an insider critical of the discipline, even when an individual academic may have concerns about the usefulness of the content in the introductory text, other pressures from within the disciplinary culture of the academy intrude. There is the assumption that a standard set of topics will be taught in the first year, and that unless these topics are taught, academics risk criticism from their colleagues and students alike for failing to teach material upon which the next level subject is founded. Further, Heyne (1995: 150) explains the quality assurance mechanisms that the disciplinary culture of Economics provides for the induction of potential new members into the disciplinary community:

> Teachers present what appears in the textbooks, the textbooks offer what the teachers expect, and the teachers expect what has been in the textbooks for as long as they can remember.

The result is a discipline that portrays itself as ideologically and methodologically harmonious. Introductory Economics textbooks offer students a narrative of the patient evolution of the discipline framed by only those 'significant' theorists whose contributions have been taken up into the mainstream. In this regard, the pressures from the disciplinary community of Economics have tended to approve and promote a transmission pedagogy founded upon textbook knowledge positioned as rarefied and authoritative. However, there is a growing body of literature from within the

academy which is seeking to acknowledge these shortcomings and is designed to stimulate a revision not only of what constitutes undergraduate Economics but also how it is taught. The nature, style and presentation of textbooks remain central issues in this debate (Aslanbeigui and Naples, 1996; Becker and Watts, 1996; Skousen, 1997; Becker, 2000).

In higher education critical reading is a ubiquitous requirement of all subjects and disciplines. Yet Swales (1993: 224) and others have alerted us to the potential reading problems that may accompany textbooks, particularly where it is an objective of the course to ensure that students read critically. However, student readers of Economics textbooks have to contend with several concurrent and often irreconcilable problems. These texts are linear in organisation and introduce new terminology, concepts and ideas in a spiral fashion so that each new term or idea is dependent to a large degree on earlier items. Students rarely read these texts in this way and may even skip whole sections of the text when completing a one-semester course. So while the textbooks may be very comprehensive, students are directed to read only parts of the text. As a consequence the students' level of knowledge may be too vague and poorly grounded to allow them to easily read the texts so that they have to move far back into the text to seek clarification (Hewing, 1990:35).

Operating as they do on the periphery of the culture of Economics, students at the introductory level are not able to read like 'insiders' or expert players in the discipline simply because they lack the fund of special information, 'relevant claims' and 'received opinion' with which to make specialised meaning from the texts (Dillon, 1992: 39). The result is, as Anderson et al. (1977) contend, that many students can acquire 'a large amount of information and a number of concepts and principles in a piece-meal fashion, without integrating the new learning into existing knowledge structures, and without understanding the *Weltanschauung* of contemporary economics' (p. 378)

Economics is constructed and promoted as a technical and scientific discourse. It is rarely acknowledged, that the 'facts' and 'laws' of Economics are discursive constructions, that economists in essence tell each other 'stories' about the economy derived from different assumptions and resulting in different competing economic models, policy outcomes and interpretations of history (see McCloskey, 1995). Thus the economy is constituted by a set of 'discourses that provide the economic concepts, modes of analysis, statistical estimates, econometric methods and policy debates that constitute the different analytical understandings of the economy' (Brown, 1993: 70).

The Data

The shock of the textbook

Early on in the ethnographic fieldwork, my attention was repeatedly drawn to what seemed, from my foreign disciplinary perspective, a peculiar obsession among the lecturing staff with the selection, place and importance of the textbook. In lectures and tutorials, students were exhorted to read the textbook. At the beginning of lectures the assembled students (156 in the first year, and 189 in the second year of

the study) would be asked: 'Have you done the reading?' The textbook was positioned as central in preparing for and reviewing topics covered in the lectures. In this cultural and disciplinary context, the textbook took on a level of importance and assumed an authority similar to that exercised by devotional texts in the course of religious observance. More significantly, it is also reminiscent of the use of canonical texts in training novices for religious orders. Despite the wealth of other printed materials made available to students, the textbook emerged as, and remained, the most important, and revered of texts among the teaching staff and, after a very short period of induction, among the students as well.

Introduction to Economics can be usefully thought of as an activity system that is object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically constituted and re-created by participants in micro-level interactions while deploying certain discursive tools. In this sense, it only comes into being when re-created in micro-level interactions in communities of practice mediated by the artefacts and the 'rules' of the discipline of Economics. Figure 1 graphically displays the way the textbook frames all of the activities and events embodied in the lectures, the tutorials, assignments, and examinations. These activities and events are a gloss on the textbook, requiring the textbook for the interpretation of their meaning and sense making.

Insert Figure 1

The initial and abiding impression of the textbook concerned its size and weight. Despite the weight and the difficulty of carrying around all of the textbooks for four subjects, students quickly realised that, together with its size and weight, the textbook also represented the essential keystone in the overall structure of the course. The following student comments illustrate how they came to see the textbook:

> I wouldn't like to try to get through the subject without it, just by attending lectures, because one complements the other basically.
> (Pauline, interview 1)

> I mean, it's virtually a Bible because everything's based around it ... everything you do is directed from that book.
> (Renee, interview 1)

> [Y]ou can probably survive if you don't go to the lectures, as long as you read the text[book].
> (Arnold, interview 1)

> The Economics textbook [was] mainly important to me, because most of the subject I learn from there.
> (Iwan, interview 1)

Both successful and unsuccessful students were equally able to recognise that while other components of the course were useful the textbook was *the text* that had to be engaged with and the content learnt. However, being aware of the importance of the textbook and the role it was meant to play did not ensure that a student would necessarily acquire the resources to pass the course.

While the academic staff wanted their students to become attentive, critical, perceptive readers and writers in their discipline, they also expected students without undue difficulties to read their way into the canon of knowledge, methodology, beliefs and values enshrined in the textbook. The text was so promoted by staff that students perceived it as privileged. From numerous staff comments in lectures and tutorials, students were mostly persuaded to avoid reading other books and were not referred to other readings or articles.

From the students' perspective the refrain 'Have you done the reading?' mediated almost every contact students had with teaching staff. Lectures and tutorials were begun with general requests for students to indicate, by raising their hands, whether they had undertaken the assigned reading before the lecture or tutorial. The expectation that students would 'do the reading' from the textbook was carried forward and reiterated by every member of the teaching staff. Students who had not completed the reading before tutorial groups were on occasions even asked to leave. Comments, commands, inquiries, and 'threats' punctuated teaching events:

> Before I go any further: how many people have done their reading? . . .
> No skin off our nose if you don't do the reading . . .
> (Lecture 2)

> All right, now how's the reading going? How many people have not read up to or through chapter 4, please?
> (Lecture 4)

> Now the rule will be if you have not done the tutorial exercise [derived from a textbook reading], you'll be asked to leave the tutorial.
> (Lecture 6)

> I can see how many people haven't been into their textbooks, Chapters 7 and 8, because you would already have come across this diagram, so you wouldn't have to be able to, you wouldn't have had to copy it down . . .
> (Lecture 8)

Despite the overwhelmingly explicit emphasis on the need for students to independently read the textbook, members of staff exemplified unsophisticated views of reading. This is not to say that all of the faculty members were insensitive to the problems students faced in reading their way into the textbook. It was a great frustration to the teaching staff that students appeared not to be doing the reading for tutorials and lectures; a matter often raised and discussed informally over lunch and in corridor chat between staff members. I have used the word 'appeared' deliberately in the last sentence, because the evidence I gathered from students indicated that while all of them attempted to 'do the reading', not all of them were effective in the reading they were doing.

'Use your own words': The danger of other people's words

The ambivalent nature of students' disciplinary alignment and the problematic nature of student reading in order to write are most graphically illustrated in the academy's rules regarding plagiarism. Writing in the academy is infused with notions of originality, creativity, authorship, intellectual inquiry and Western writing practices. When written assignments were being prepared for submission the issue of plagiarism was repeatedly highlighted and emphasised by the lecturing staff and therefore loomed large as a spectre of concern for all students in the course. For students, the problems of avoiding plagiarism are often more complicated than academic staff acknowledge as these comments attest:

> [T]hey make sure you don't forget about it. . . [I]t's a real hassle, because you get confused on what is and what isn't and because they emphasise it so much it kind of scares you...
> (Michelle, interview 2)

> [W]ith a definition they've really - they've obviously looked at it --- very closely and probably for a very long time and come up with the very best definition that they possibly can --- how can you reword it? So, yeah, I sort of - the suggestion from other people was, well --- if you really feel that you can't sort of reword it into something that it maybe needs to be simpler or something --- just in your words, all you can do is write it down as it is and reference it . . . Dangers of plagiarism, yeah, for sure.
> (Arnold, interview 1)

Undergraduate students in the disciplines find themselves in a double bind when they are expected to come to terms with a fixed canon of content knowledge and to reproduce that knowledge in their own words (Pennycook, 1997).

The explicit requirement to use 'your own words' was reiterated in the lectures, course materials and printed subject guides. This criterion was also identified in the assignment questions as an aspect of the assessment in a student's success. The phrase 'in your own words' signalled a tension that existed between learning the words and concepts of others from textbooks and lectures and then somehow making them over so that they seem the students' own. These tensions and anxieties are inherent in the way that words and language are learned in the market place of discourses and social interaction. As Bakhtin (1981: 293-294) observes:

> [T]he word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.

In the university context, this whole process is inter-woven with a requirement to sort and rank students. What students write and how well they write in order to demonstrate their learning is critical to the grade they are awarded and their subsequent progress in the discipline and the university.

While the academics gave careful consideration to the setting of assignment and examination questions, they nonetheless anticipated that students would already know how to write before coming into the course. The processes of learning new discourses, learning new content knowledge and being able to express these in 'their own words', as if they are indeed their own, was not seen as problematic, complex or particularly difficult. As the textbook was *the* linguistic and textual model students were encouraged to use when writing assignments and examination answers it was also the cause of anxiety, indecision and confusion for students. The following comments reflect the anxieties of the participants:

> I tried to put in as much --- sort of Economics as what I could but since I mean, I haven't really ever done anything before, so I didn't have a really good idea --- what sort of terminology and that sort of stuff to use.
> (Linda, interview 2)

> I didn't want to make it sound stupid, one has to use the right terms and --- but at the same time you didn't want it to sound like you were copying from the book, so it was really hard because you had to give them both . . . [Y]ou had to make sure it was in your own words but use the right terms.
> (Michelle, interview 2)

The line is not easily drawn in the sand between 'common property', that is, concepts and ideas that did not require acknowledgment, and those that did require a footnote. Pauline's response to my question: 'How did you avoid plagiarism from the textbook?' echoes the response of other students:

> Oh, you get really paranoid about that! Just everybody who's spoken to us has said --- "It's stealing, it's cheating, we don't like cheaters here!" . . . Yeah, it's quite hard --- it's scary, because it's so important and you know how important it is but it is sometimes you're reading things and you think: "Where's the line between common property and their ideas or their words come into play?" And it's hard, but here's hoping!
>
> (Pauline, interview 2)

Pauline had just completed the first assignment at the time of this interview and was awaiting her results. Like many other students, she remained unsure of whether she had acknowledged sufficiently to avoid being called a 'cheater' and whether she had used enough of her own words to meet the requirements of the tasks. I turn now to examine Pauline's struggles when writing answers for the first assignment and how she wrestled with the problems of writing in her own words while appropriating the ideas and words of others without plagiarism.

Pauline: a case study

Even if Economics had not been a compulsory subject in the first year of the Business degree Pauline would still have chosen to study it. She had a long-standing interest in the subject and at the end of her first semester of study she remained hopeful that she would undertake a major in the discipline. She managed the processes of alignment through revisions of her own drafts, rather than retrospectively working it out from marker feedback on the first assignment. Pauline made extensive use of the drafting process with which to think through the concepts and problems she encountered. By writing and drawing successive diagrams she documented her progressive fusion with the discourses, genres and textual practices of the discipline and along the way registered the subtle shifts in her identity that took place over time. Pauline' case provides a richly revealing illustration of the role that writing can play in learning and uncovers the struggles students have in making critical decisions about how and what to write in response to prompts. By examining Pauline's drafting processes for answers to one question in the first assignment, the case exposes the false starts, diversions, digressions, re-alignments and identity work that she goes through. Pauline wanted a good grade for the subject but she also wanted to become an economist.

Question 1 of the first assignment focussed on the concept of opportunity cost and required students to define the concept, illustrate the answer with a diagram, and provide a 'real life' example. The question read:

> *Use a relevant example and diagram to explain the relationship between scarcity, choice and opportunity cost.*

An answer of 300 words for the value of 15 marks was specified. Pauline's explanation of what she did in completing this task is revealing. She located a definition of opportunity cost in the textbook, and then explained the concept. Yet, when we examine some of the drafts of Pauline's answer to the question it becomes clear that her recall of what she did conceals a more complex process. The shifts in focus, alterations and changes in wording between one of the earlier drafts and the final draft indicate the way in which she sets up an inter-textual dialogue with the textbook, the lectures and her lecture notes. Pauline has an awareness of her own cognitive processes; she is able to articulate a connection between her reading, writing and learning:

> I find that when I write I can communicate what I understand, what I think more effectively than when I speak, so to me writing is the preferred medium anyway . . . [W]hen I read my chapters, I take notes, I don't highlight . . . I take the notes that I think are important from the reading and then when I write them out it --- it lets you understand that you do know what you're thinking and what you're talking about and I found that - like, I'd have written an answer and I'd re-read it and I'd think: "No, no, that sounds confused, you know, that's not what I mean," or I'd read it and I'd think: "No, that's just wrong" and just do it again.
>
> (Pauline, Interview 2)

Pauline generates her drafts and acts as her own reader/reviewer, all the while interrogating the question to ensure she is meeting the explicit requirements, not just in terms of content but also in word length. She is astute in her observation that even though members of the teaching staff know the answers to the questions set for the assignment, the task for the student is to show that they also know the answer. As Pauline says, the student must adopt the conceit that the teaching staff who will be doing the marking of the assignments, do not already know the answers:

> I guess you have to write like you're writing to someone who doesn't know or who doesn't know what you know I guess is more to the point.
> (Pauline, Interview 2)

Her review of her own writing and her assessment of her success in meeting the demands of the task are manifested more in the actual changes she makes to the drafts she writes. The opening paragraph of an early draft answer to Question 1 reads:

> *The foundation of economics is that human wants are unlimited, while the resources available to satisfy these wants are limited. This means that choices must be made as to which of our wants we shall satify [sic], in doing so we must sacrifice the opportunity cost of satisfying a want and can be measured in many ways, for example time, or goods and services.*

By the time she writes her second draft the first sentence has been altered so as to index a reference to the textbook as her source and to ensure that she shows the relationship between wants and resources. She does not mention the term scarcity, an explicit requirement of the question set. The paragraph now reads:

> *The fundamental fact of economics as described in Economics (1992) is that human wants are unlimited, while the resources available to satisfy these wants are limited. This means that choices must be made as to which of our wants we shall satisfy, in doing so we must sacrifice the opportunity cost of satisfying a want and can be measured in many ways, for example, time, or goods and services.*

In the final draft of this opening paragraph Pauline makes further changes and corrections. The first sentence is altered to show a relationship between human wants, resources and scarcity and she corrects the publication date for the textbook. The second sentence, which has been stable over the two earlier drafts, is now broken into two sentences so as to emphasise the notion of sacrifice and to clarify the definition of opportunity cost. The paragraph reads:

> *The fundamental fact of economics as described in Economics (1994) is that human wants are unlimited, while the resources available to satisfy these wants are limited, this in turn, leading to scarcity. This means that choices must be made as to which of our wants we shall satisfy, in doing so we must sacrifice the opportunity to satisfy another of our wants. This sacrifice is referred to as the opportunity cost of satisfying a want and can be measured in many ways, for example, time, or goods and services.*

Pauline has made only subtle changes but these reveal the inter-textual 'voices' at play as she fashions a text that acknowledges the authority of the textbook and also allows her to display, in her own words, a grasp of the concept of opportunity cost. This same process is replicated for other questions.

In speaking of her answer to the whole question Pauline reveals the degree to which she is conscious of writing to someone whom she must assume does not know what she knows while being careful to adhere to the required word length of the question. Even when she believes she has completed the task, there are further changes just prior to submission of the paper:

> Question 1, which I thought that I'd done and I thought that I'd done really well, I then went back when I'd printed out what I thought was pretty much a final copy, I went back and read it and scrapped a whole paragraph and added a couple of small words to another one and another couple of sentences to the bottom of another one and felt that that was much better.
> (Pauline, interview 2)

Further, Pauline's case graphically illustrates that while we might examine different drafts of a student's work to better understand compositional processes and learning, we do not always tap the struggles that a student is experiencing in coming to terms with the ideological dimensions of the task and the discipline's interests. These fundamental struggles are not necessarily indexed and registered in written drafts.

For Pauline, the choices are subtly wrought in that she has a strong interest in the subject. However, there is identity formation work here as well. While Pauline provided me with a number of drafts of her answers these were only made available after she had made some quite critical decisions. Essentially, she began 'writing' her answers long before she had embarked on the drafts provided. Of her drafting and compositional processes she observed:

> I read the questions a lot, because as we did each lecture I could see - I started to formulate in my head ... the answers to the questions and as we did the tutorials and I did the reading, then I started to draft the answers. Sometimes I'd draft the answers before I'd done enough work and then I went backwards.
> (Pauline, interview 2)

The drafts she did provide me with represent her revisions after she had decided not to use as her 'relevant example' the opportunity costs of the State Government's decision to locate a Casino and a Grand Prix racing car track in the centre of the city of Melbourne, Australia's second largest city of three and a half million people.

The text below is taken from a second interview conducted in the sixth week of the course following submission of the first assigned paper for the semester. Pauline's account of how she chose a 'relevant example' with which to illustrate opportunity cost discloses further aspects of her ideological alignment with the discourses of Introductory Economics classroom. Pauline gave careful thought to the relevant example she would use to illustrate the concept of opportunity cost. As she says:

> The biggest problem I had was trying to choose my example - my real life

example of opportunity cost, because there were so many to me and they were all so good that I - and I don't think that you got the best couple of drafts because I think I threw them out before you asked me; but I actually started to do drafts on a couple of things. One was the opportunity cost of using Albert Park as a Grand Prix site[i], because it's ---- very prominent in the news about this --- but it was just so overwhelming and so complex that I thought: "No, I'm just going to get myself into trouble", so I had to pick something that was more simple.

I: *Right, so it was just a more straightforward sort of way of looking at it?*

Pauline: Yeah, and the other one of course was the Casino, because the social cost of the Casino to me is one of the biggest opportunity costs of having it there. But I didn't want to start getting into a case where I'm getting on my soapbox about it because that wasn't what the question wanted to hear anyway. So, that was the form I had with question 1 - so I just had to dissect it, define those points and then see how ---

I: *And choose an example then that became quite apolitical in a sense?*

Pauline: Yeah, well see that's my fault probably because I'm so opinionated.

(Pauline, interview 2)

Pauline grasps the concept of opportunity cost - scarce resources once allocated to one area cannot be spent on another – and her new way of conceptualising the world makes her ask: what are the opportunity costs of the Casino and the Grand Prix? As thoughtful and as interesting as her answer might have been, her perception is that this is not what 'the question wanted to hear'. Indeed, the assignment question is asking for something that is much simpler to achieve and does not require this level of engagement with social and political issues. When asked about her final choice of example, the following exchange took place:

Pauline: The cotton shortage and so the continuing consumption of cotton goods would lead to less consumption of other goods.

I: *Oh --- and a much more straightforward case?*

Pauline: Much more straightforward - no chance for me to get in there and say what I think.
(Pauline, interview 2)

She was able to go directly from an article in the newspaper reporting a worldwide cotton shortage (see Figure 2), to an illustration of the consequences of materials shortages in the textbook. Using the identified cotton shortage as the example, she then neatly displaced the example from the textbook with the details of her 'relevant' real-life example chosen from a newspaper article.

Insert Figure 2

Such a process as this encourages replication and transcription of solutions reached by imitating examples already worked in the textbook. Pauline has learnt one of the 'rules of the game'. Her role as a learner and writer in this disciplinary context is to read and reproduce, not to hold strong opinions about complex social issues which are not raised or addressed by the textbook. In completing Question 1 of Assignment 1 she has learnt to choose examples that fit the assumptions, concepts, and the theoretical model set out in the course and the textbook. She has also learnt to tame her intellectually engaged, questioning mind, so as to avoid trouble by fitting in to the beliefs and practices of the disciplinary context. Her written answers go through a number of iterations and she wrestles with the concepts, the diagrams and the language until she makes them seem her own. It could be tempting to portray this as a simple model of transmission and absorption of information, but this explanation does not reflect the complexity of the struggles going on.

The content, concepts and terminology which students are expected to learn often seem to them so aptly expressed by textbook authors that they have no words of their own in which to register them when they are required to demonstrate their understanding in writing. This seems to be what one faculty staff member is tilting at when he suggests that an over-reliance on the textbook impacts negatively on the quality of student reading and writing:

> I think it is very much textbook-based, the learning that they do. There is a very great difficulty in getting students to read very widely and to adopt different approaches. I suppose it is sounding a little bit cynical but the sort of thing that I see a lot of is student work that looks extremely similar to each other...The sorts of models that they follow very much come out of the textbooks. That is the other thing that you get, you don't get much plagiarism but you do get pretty extensive paraphrasing of texts and some lack of discernment too. Because you will often find materials in essays that really have no business being in the answer but they happen to be in the flow of the text at that point. (Bob, interview 1)

Faced with the dilemma of writing from but not copying from an authoritative textbook, some students not surprisingly reported that they adopted the strategy of going to the library to find other introductory textbooks and copying bits and pieces from each. There are many of these textbooks which are unerringly similar. The students then used these to form a pastiche, which they hoped was accurate in terms of content and meaning, without being too close to the text of the course textbook. As might be expected in the context of the academy, students mostly write in response to prompts from the lecturing staff. Lecture notes, notes from the textbook, notes from the tutorial sessions, assignment questions and examinations are written as part of reading in order to write. Writing then is undertaken so as to demonstrate reading, alignment with the discourses and content of the subject, and is essential in ranking students.

When it came to writing answers to assignment questions, students felt themselves wedged between a rock and a hard place. How could they express in their own words that which was more effectively expressed in the textbook? Until the first assignment was graded and returned students were left wondering whether they had trespassed beyond the boundaries of 'common property' and whether their own words had been sufficient to demonstrate their alignment with the discourses of Introductory Economics.

Conclusion

Reading and writing at university is always undertaken in the cultural context of a particular discipline or field. Academic literacies can only be located, described and studied in a disciplinary context and students are always being disciplined through participation in and alignment with specific disciplinary and ideological practices (Bazerman, 1994).

Textbooks by their very nature, represent authoritative, received knowledge that students are expected to learn rather than challenge. In Economics, textbooks are central to the pedagogical and epistemological processes in that they introduce students to concepts, assumptions and models, scaffolding students as they learn to

tell and retell the received 'stories' of Economics – opportunity, supply and demand, monopoly and so on. In positioning the textbook as an authoritative text on which students are expected to rely, the teaching staff unwittingly generated concerns and fears among students when writing in Introductory Economics. The concerns and fears about plagiarism that framed their writing were either confirmed or alleviated when their first assignment was marked and returned.

In the absence of other advice and models students used the textbook and other 'superficial' instructions about constructing texts to assemble texts that met these specifications. However, we have also witnessed the struggles, resistances and dilemmas that students have in coming into contact and sometimes conflict with the values and beliefs of the disciplinary community. Ideologically these communities can be uncompromising in their requirement that participants conform. Learning to read and write Economics is not simply a matter of manipulating diagrams and retelling received knowledge, it is also a matter, as Freedman and Medway (1994:5) argue, of learning the 'social processes by which the world, reality, and facts are made' in a specific disciplinary context.

Introductory Economics is located at the outer edge of the activity systems of the disciplinary community of Economics (Russell, 1997). So it is that student writing at this level has more to do with 'doing school' and getting a grade than knowledge making in the discipline. Even so, getting a grade by writing in a way that marks out a student as a sympathetic participant in the discourses of the subject is an essential achievement. The evidence from this study would suggest that introductory textbooks, while designed to induct students into the discipline of Economics, may make learning to read and write Economics more difficult than disciplinary insiders would ever imagine it to be.

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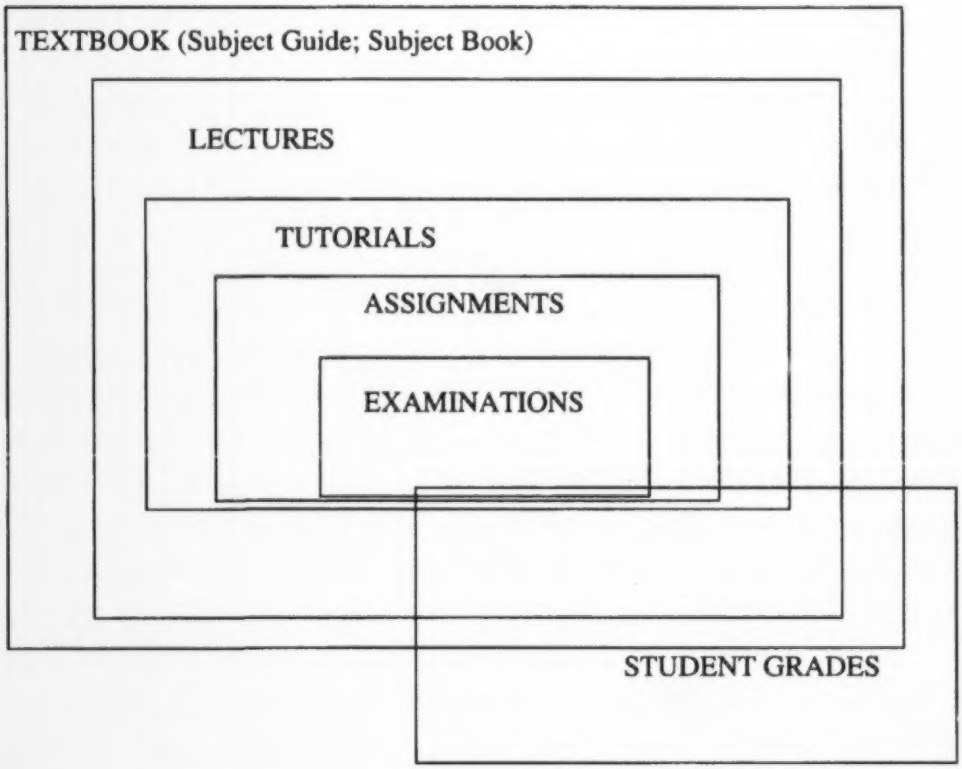
Figure 1


TEXTBOOK (Subject Guide; Subject Book)
LECTURES
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ASSIGNMENTS
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Figure 2 World cotton shortage

[i] During the early months of 1995 there was considerable debate and protest concerning the decision by the politically conservative Victorian Government's to locate a racetrack for the Australian Formula One Grand Prix in the suburban streets of Melbourne. Concurrently, expressions of concern were being aired about the government's embrace of gambling and a decision to locate a Casino in central Melbourne. An earlier decision to make poker machines widely available in hotels and clubs throughout the State had also created considerable dissension across the community, drawing criticism from welfare agencies and the established churches that conduct a number of these agencies.

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